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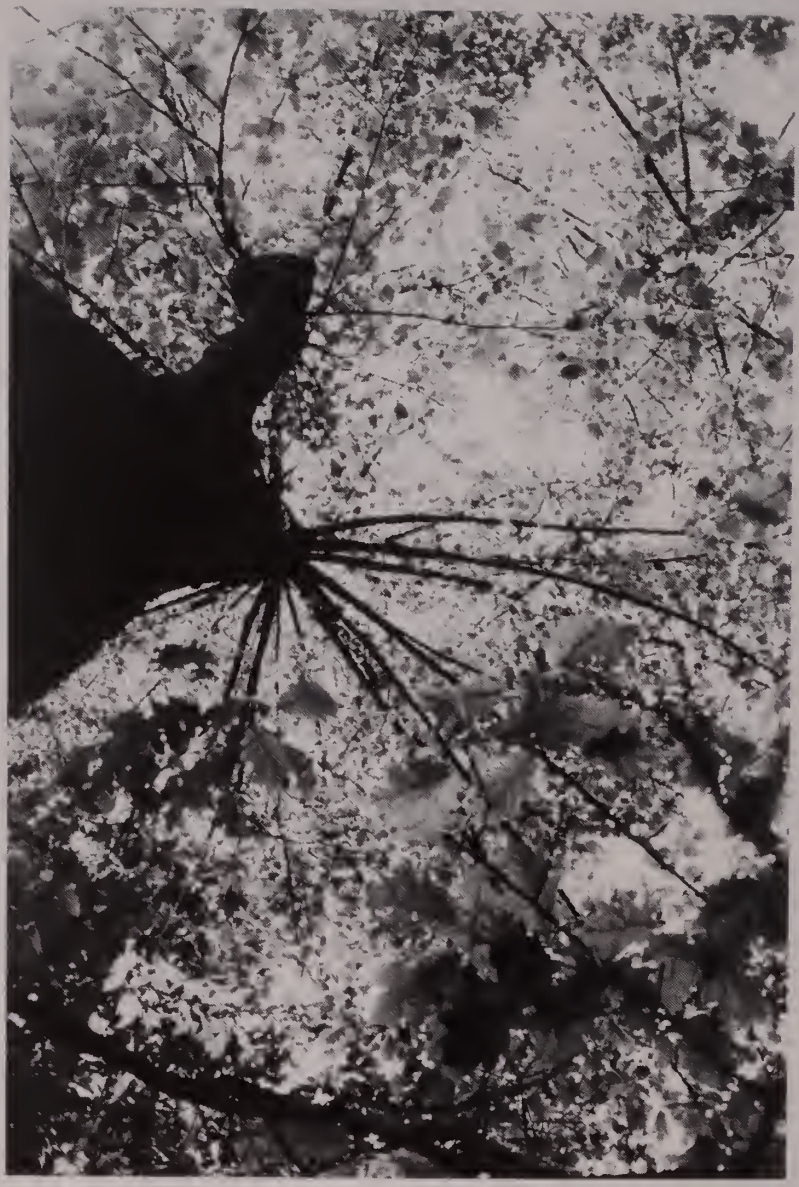

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Thank you MMI staff.

Contents

Art

Ana Barber		2,24
Rudy Ramos	"Anger"	8
Odell Eldridge		10
Christopher Marlow	"The Hero"	17
Lillian Frankel		20,21
Doug Pippin		28
Sheri Swackhamer	"Waves . . . of Sand"	31
Beth Hamby	"Dana"	34
Tony Song		35,61
David Kushner	"The Contemplative Process of Ice Cream Consumption"	40
	"Philosophical Metro"	41
Margaret Ramos		46
David Medwith		55
Chan Chao		58
Kim S. Riegel	"Das rennen"	59

Fiction

John Thompson	"Fleas"	11
Matthew Moore	"College Takes a Holiday"	29
Adina Rishe	"Indian Summer"	47

Poetry

Valerie Russell	"The Fire Tower"	6
Renee R. Curry	"The Exact Moment at Which She Left"	9
Paul Elliott	"October"	18
David Churchill	"I Joined the North Vietnamese Army"	22
Laura Bellows	"Hysterectomy"	25
Nix Funt	"Turquoise Motel"	26
Diane Vance	"Lost"	32
Nancy O'Donnell	"Salvation is Rescinded on the Chattahoochee"	36
Michael Walker	"Haze"	38
Joel David Aronfy	"Search Called Off in Bay Boating Accident"	42
David Klima	"Remembrance of a Village"	44
Turi Baston	"Off the Road and into a Ditch"	56
Rollins Briggs	"Like David's Marat, My Love"	60
Laura Dickinson	"Jacob's Ladder"	62
Allen Hogg	"UMCP—January, 1987"	64

The Fire Tower

I don't remember how we started
taking off together, leaving all the rules
and curfews tucked inside windows we
sneaked out of. I was just plain difficult
and stubborn, always first to raise objections
or explode, loud, and raging, sometimes, out
of control. You seemed shy and quiet, but
just strong enough to guide my shoulders, make me
walk away beside you, cursing all the way.
You'd watch me stone the trees, in silence,
let me kick up rocks until I'd stumble. Then
you'd wait for me to tell you things I'd never
spoken out loud before. I told you that I didn't
care, I hated life. And then we walked
some more and I told you how I always heard
the river cracking in my head. You'd laugh
and start to hum until we both were singing
nonsense. Somewhere, along the way, we
picked up Patsy, with the long dark hair.
I made her cry so easily that it frightened
me, so I stopped and let her walk beside us.
You remember the first time that we all climbed
the fire tower? She went first, and eager,

with you right behind me. I never said how
scared I was, how close I was to jumping
when we reached the highest platform where
we all could sit. You must have figured
something, since I was so quiet, still. You
talked more than ever that night and kept
your right hand perched on my left arm. That's
when Patsy shifted, started trembling, rambling
on about the wind, and how lonely life
could be. She went on telling us about her
father, how he touched her, how it hurt,
and how she wanted more than anything to jump.
I grabbed her arm with my right hand and pulled
her pale cheek close to mine. We all stayed
there, shivering, until the light came. I
don't remember how we got down, or if we got
in trouble, being out so late, but I do recall
how beautiful the sun spread, just below
the trees and how we kept on holding on
to each other and how we all survived.

—Valerie Russell

Anger *Rudy Ramos*

The Exact Point at Which She Left

You want to know the exact point?
Well, it was right after supper;
we'd already ordered dessert.
I was telling her about the fight I saw
the night before at J.P.'s in Portland.
The whole staff had gone down there
for Happy Hour, and before you know it,
this guy starts punching this woman
right in the face, over and over.
I couldn't believe it! I—

Her reaction? You mean to the story?
Well, she seemed okay.
I mean she seemed to be interested.
She stayed with it and even jumped
when I pulled back my arm
to demonstrate the punch.
We laughed at that I remember.

Then she went to the restroom.
And, she took her purse. I remember that.
But women always take their purses.
And I waited and waited,
but she never came back.

—Renee R. Curry

Odell Eldridge

Fleas

I guess the cat was the first one of us to know about the fleas. I don't know why I didn't think of fleas with the cat scratching the way it was, but I didn't. Maybe if I'd figured things out sooner, it all wouldn't have gotten so out of hand.

Julia wanted me to get rid of the cat. The cat was scratching so much, there was hair all over the place. Julia said she couldn't stand to look at all that cat hair. She said it made her sick to her stomach just to see a wad of cat hair. It didn't seem like such a big deal to me at the time.

Things were pretty bad between Julia and me. We'd only been living together about three months or so, but things were really falling apart. We didn't talk much, and when we did, we ended up fighting. Sometimes she'd walk out, and I wouldn't see her again till the next day. She said she had a friend: she went and stayed with a friend. I never pushed it. Maybe I should've.

* * *

Last Monday I was out in the living room watching some late-night TV. The cat came in and jumped up on the couch. The cat had been acting strange for the past week or so: jumping up on all the furniture, running around in circles. And scratching. Anyway, the cat jumped up on the couch next to me, and it started to scratch. It scratched so hard the hair was falling off in clumps. That's when I thought of fleas. Only fleas, I thought, can make a cat scratch like that.

I picked up the cat and looked through its hair. I didn't see anything, but then it's a black cat, and I don't guess you can see fleas on a black cat. Then I remembered reading someplace about how you could tell if you had fleas in your house by putting on white socks, and then looking for the fleas that jumped up on your feet. So I went and got a pair of gym socks and put them on and sat down again, watching my feet. After a while I saw a little speck on one sock. A little black speck. I bent down to look closer, and the little speck disappeared. I got up and stood in the middle of the room. After a while there were two little specks on my socks. I tried to pinch one between my fingers, but it jumped away onto the rug. I couldn't believe it. Fleas. I'd never seen a flea before in my life.

* * *

Next morning I told Julia about the fleas. She'd never seen a flea before either, so I did the sock trick for her. Two of them jumped on right away. This time, I managed to catch one. I stood there for a minute, with the flea between my finger and my thumb. I wanted to get a look at it, but I didn't want to let it get away.

"Wash it down the sink," Julia said. "Oh, God. Fleas."

I washed it down the sink. Julia just stood there, looking around the room. Like she thought they were all watching her or something. I ran the garbage disposal for a minute, then I told Julia I'd call the rental office and have them come in and spray. They'd come in the next day while we were at work, and everything would be taken care of.

"What about the cat," Julia said. "The cat must have them, too."

I told her I hadn't seen any on the cat. She asked me how can you see fleas on a black cat.

"I'll buy some flea powder today," I said.

"Damn cat," Julia said.

I called the rental office from the plant. The woman said they couldn't come out till the next Monday. "Today's Tuesday," I said. "That's a whole week." She said the exterminator only came on Mondays. I told her a week was a long time to live with fleas. She said she was sorry.

On the way home from work I stopped to get the flea powder. I saw they had cans of flea spray, too, for rugs and furniture; so I figured maybe we wouldn't need the exterminator after all. I'd take care of things myself. I bought two cans, plus the powder.

I figured I'd spray right away that afternoon, before Julia got home. She's a secretary, and she doesn't get home till about six. I'd go ahead and spray, and do the cat, and then by the time Julia got home, I could tell her everything was under control.

When I got home, the cat was sitting up on the kitchen table. Somehow the cat had figured out that the rug was where the fleas came from. I yelled at it to get off. There was hair everywhere: the cat had been up on everything, trying to keep off the rug. I didn't know what was worse, having fleas in the house (which you couldn't even see without white socks), or having this cat hair everywhere. Julia was right. It turns your stomach.

I wiped up all the cat hair with a dishrag, and locked the cat in the bathroom. Then I sprayed the whole apartment. I sprayed the rug. I sprayed the couch and the chairs and the curtains. I sprayed in the hall, and the bedroom. I used up both cans.

Then I went into the bathroom and powdered the cat. The cat meowed and fought. It blinked its eyes and drooled. When I finished with the cat I took my clothes and put them in the laundry. There was flea powder all over the bathroom floor. There were a few black specks mixed in with the powder.

When Julia got home I told her about the exterminator. I told her how I'd taken care of things myself. She noticed that where I'd sprayed, the rug had gotten darker. She said I'd probably have to pay management for a new one. I told her I didn't thingk so. It would probably go back to normal, once it dried. I rubbed my hand over the rug. It was sticky where I'd sprayed. My hand smelled like Raid.

"Anyway," Julia said, "they're gone." She was looking around the room. She

looked like she really didn't believe they were gone at all. "Just thinking about them makes me itch," she said. I told her I'd been itching, too.

* * *

Next morning I was sitting up in bed, watching Julia get dressed. One of those morning shows was on TV, and a man was talking about elementary particles. He was a scientist. He was saying how elementary particles were the smallest thing known to man. They were so small that no microscope could see them. You knew they were there only because you could see there effects.

"They should try white socks," I said.

"What?" Julia said. She hadn't been listening to the program. She'd been quiet ever since she got home last night. I didn't know what was up.

Julia was shaking out her underpants and looking inside.

"What are you doing that for," I said.

"What do you think."

"They're all dead," I said. "And they wouldn't be in there, anyway."

She stopped getting dressed and looked at me. "What's that supposed to mean?"

It didn't mean anything.

"I mean there's no way they could have gotten in there," I said.

"You're always making comments like that," she said. "You think you're so goddamn clever."

She walked out of the room in just her underpants. I watched her go. A minute later she came back with a cup of coffee. I wanted to ask her if she was coming home tonight, or if she was going to her friend's, instead. But I didn't. Things were bad enough. She finished getting dressed, and left without saying anything. She left the coffee on the dresser. On the TV, the scientist was getting up out of his chair. People were clapping. He shook hands with the host.

When I heard the door slam I got up, and got the white socks from the dresser. I put them on and went into the living room: no fleas. I said to myself, at least that's taken care of.

* * *

That afternoon, the cat was sleeping on the coffe table when I got home. I figured it didn't know yet that the fleas were gone. The cat jumped down and ran away when I came in.

Julia wouldn't get home for another hour. There was nothing in the fridge for dinner, so I decided to go out for some carry-out Chinese.

By the time I got back with the food, Julia was home. She seemed happy that I'd gotten carry-out Chinese. "Did you get egg rolls," she said. I set the little cartons out on the table and got some plates, then we sat down. It was nice, eating Chinese like that. We used to eat Chinese all the time, when we were first living together.

I asked her how was work. "Fine," she said, "how was yours?"

I told her it was fine. Then I said, "I'm sorry about this morning." I knew it was better just to leave it alone, but I said it anyway. I felt like it wasn't settled.

Julia didn't answer.

"It was my fault," I said.

"I don't want to talk about it," she said.

We ate some more, but the quiet bothered me. I asked her if she remembered how we used to eat carry-out Chinese all the time. She nodded without looking at me. That's when I first thought that she wanted to leave. She was just waiting for a reason.

I wanted to say something, to settle things. But I saw she wasn't paying any attention to me. She was looking down at the table. I looked down too: there was cat hair all over the table. Some of it had stuck to the edges of the carry-out cartons. A little clump of hair had rolled onto Julia's plate, like a tiny tumbleweed. She was looking at the hair.

"I can't eat anymore," she said. She pushed herself away from the table. "I can't stand it."

I didn't say anything. I started to clear away the leftovers.

* * *

Next morning Julia left for work without saying anything. After she'd left, I was sitting in bed, and I felt something on my arm. It was a flea. I caught it and flushed it down the toilet, then I went and got the white socks. In a minute I saw five of them. I couldn't believe it. I didn't know what to do.

At work I asked my friend Bernie what he thought I should do about the fleas. Bernie has hunting dogs he keeps in his house. He loves those dogs. He's been divorced twice because of them. He always jokes about it, like he gets along with dogs better than women.

When I asked Bernie, he said he'd never had fleas in the house, but he knew something I could try. "Why don't you try bombing the place," he said.

At first I thought he was trying to be funny.

"Flea bombs," he said. "Foggers. You set 'em off in a room and they spray all over. No way the fleas can get away."

I told him foggers sounded like a good deal. He said they were worth a try. "And don't worry," he said. "I won't tell anybody you got fleas."

As it turned out, the foggers were right next to the flea spray in the store. I bought one for every room. The directions said you had to leave the house for two hours after you'd set the things off. I didn't know what to do about Julia. I figured maybe we could go see a movie.

When I got home, the cat was on the coffee table again. There was a half-finished rum and coke on the table, and a note. Julia had been home. The note said she couldn't stand the fleas and the hair anymore. She was going to stay with a friend. She'd come back when the fleas were gone.

I picked up the rum and coke. There was cat hair in it, stuck along the rim of the glass. For a minute I thought I was going to be sick.

* * *

I set off the flea bombs that night. I was going to put newspaper down under them, so the carpet wouldn't turn colors, but then I thought that maybe the fleas underneath the paper would escape the fog. I'd pay for a new rug if I had to. I wanted things settled.

I set up a bomb in every room. I opened up all the closets, and all the cupboards and drawers. I didn't like the idea of the stuff getting on my clothes, but I figured I could wash everything. I closed all the windows.

I took the cat and locked it in the car, then I went back up to the apartment and set off the bombs. Then I went and saw something called "Nancy's Fancy" at the drive-in. Bernie had recomended it. I felt kind of weird with the cat in the car, going to see a movie like that.

I didn't know what to expect when I got home. As it turned out, the place smelled like Raid, and everything was sort of sticky. I'd forgotten to clean up the cat hair before, so now the hair was all stuck to the furniture. I just left it, because I didn't want to wipe off all the flea killer. I didn't know if the stuff was supposed to kill the fleas right away or what, but I figured better safe than sorry.

I opened up all the windows, but the smell was pretty strong. I didn't like the idea of being in there all alone, breathing the stuff. What if I passed out? I was feeling a little strange.

I figured the best thing would be to get something to eat, and then maybe go see another movie. I wondered if Julia would try to call while I was gone.

* * *

By the time I left for work the next morning the smell was just about gone. But everything still felt sticky. Julia hadn't called.

I just wanted to get out of there. I felt like I couldn't touch anything, like I couldn't do anything. There was even more cat hair stuck on all the furniture from the night before. The cat was sitting up on the kitchen counter, and when I went to pick it up, it hissed at me. I just wanted to get out of that place.

* * *

I stopped for a hamburger on the way home from work that night. When I got home, I found the cat asleep in the bathtub. Julia hadn't come back. I put on the white socks. I wanted to give the flea killer plenty of time to work, but it had been a whole day now.

I went and stood in the middle of the living room. I didn't see anything. I went into the kitchen and tried, then the bedroom, the bathroom, and the hall, and then I went back and stood in the living room again. I didn't see anything. I kept the white socks on all night.

* * *

The next day was Saturday. First thing, I checked again for fleas. Nothing. They were gone. I took the cat into the bathroom and powdered it. I left it lock-

ed in there while I cleaned up the rest of the place. I wiped off all the tables, and vacuumed the couch and the chairs. I wiped the kitchen counter, and all the cabinets. I washed the kitchen floor. I vacuumed the whole house. I washed all my clothes, and all of Julia's clothes. I took the sheets off the bed and washed them. Then I let the cat out and cleaned the bathroom.

By the end of the day, Julia still hadn't called. I really didn't expect her to call anymore. I heated up the leftover carry-out Chinese for dinner.

* * *

This morning, Sunday morning, I found the cat asleep in the bathtub again, and there was some hair around. I guess it'll take a little while before it figures out the fleas are gone. I hope it doesn't take too long.

I folded up all the laundry today, and put it all away. I've never had all my clothes clean at the same time before.

I have to remember to call the rental office and tell them not to send the exterminator. At first I thought maybe I should have them come and spray anyway, just to make sure, but the foggers turned the rug a funny color, and I don't want management finding out if they don't have to. And besides, I think I've got things settled.

If Julia hasn't called by tonight, I'm going to pack up all her things and set them by the door. I figure she'll come by to get her stuff some time this week while I'm at work, and I want to make things easy as possible.

—John Edward Thompson

The Hero *Christopher Marlow*

October

The fall I said I wouldn't sell in no schools
He laughed out loud.
He said think about your face, Pretty, you're still
In my club, remember?

Well, just then I remembered
When I didn't know none of his shit
And the thought of opening the door still
Seemed a little exciting.
When reading 'Be prepared to make a new friend'
In a Bazooka Joe comic strip
Made me walk all day like I had hidden
A lottery ticket (or something less valuable)
In a small gray box at home.

So, that night I spent alone in the shower
Documenting the difference between hot and cold
And getting quite confused.
Warm, as I recall, attains a color of its own
While cool remains a quick derivitive of cold itself.

And then for the next year in a room I sat with
Lines that couldn't calm me down, until
Finding my birthday in a commercial on TV
Pulled me awake
Because it seemed so much like an omen.

But to get back to what I was saying before;
I took a walk. I
Gathered all that green and just walked right out
And they never saw me again.

And now as I slide past rooms, my life is caught
On the edge of autumn that one still hears in
A song called *October*.
And here, every window features two pretty girls,
One reading and one studying her hair
Before posters of Echo (Who once called Bono fat)
And of Bono who was always too conscious to say any
Thing like that about anyone.

And I'm reminded of a leaf storm I watched with a
Boy called Chris,
How sudden it all seemed at the time.
They fall not like leaves but snow,
He said, and I love you man
But we've got to get out and get things
Started.

And I haven't opened a knocking door yet
Except that once, in the forest, in the dark,
In an anxious month called October.

—Paul Elliott

Lillian Frankel

Lillian Frankel

I Joined The North Vietnamese Army

It was a time when wives of presidents
were planting blooms along the parkways,
when we came back through summer rain,
arms filled with daffodils—a time of
wind chimes and the scent of sandalwood,
a time when we were borne along
like blossoms on a stream.

First to Paris, then to Stockholm, back to Paris,
(the Peace Talks were still dragging on), then
on to Rome. The French were most supportive.
They spoke of courage, conscience, self-determination.
The Italians were indifferent but creative.
The East Europeans were suspicious, least helpful
of them all.

We spent the first year picking rice, the second
year we carried earth in baskets on our backs,
building gun emplacements; it rained so much that year,
the mud was slick and weighed a ton—only
once the clouds rolled back enough to grant
a fleck of silver to the sky, screeching
like a nail across a piece of slate,
then far away the distant rumbles, soft and lazy,
bubbling from the ground.

They called me *Anh-Lam-Quet-Guim-Phong-Cua-Toi,*
"Comrade Guest in Charge of Sweeping Floor."
Another comrade fetched the books, a third would
pass them out. We were an orderly, well-disciplined
brigade, rising to recite, sitting down again;
you could hear the crickets chirping in the dark,
outside the window, the sleepy click of mah-jong tiles.
One felt at peace then, alone there in the dark,
except the night I almost cried.

No one can claim to feeling used to
being back who hasn't visited the Mall,
so I too visited the Mall, having
put it off awhile. The day was overcast
and cold, a good day for visiting the Mall.
I only wish there had been more to see:
a single jonquil someone must have dropped
—or left, reflecting in the blackness
of a wall, and rows of names,
reflecting in the silence of the crowd.

—David Churchill

Ana Barber

Hysterectomy

You sound so small
waking.

Liquid runs in
and out of you through clear tubes.

Your belly curves
down to pale curling hair,
your thighs are pink
with blood.

The nurse with surgical gloves
wipes it away—
the last bleeding.

she takes the stained gown

I rubbed your bare back
in circles,
just below your waist
where your hips and buttocks
flesh out soft.
My knuckles
smooth the skin
under the belt
that holds a pad in place.

I have never done this before.

Your vagina ends
in nothing now—
it does not pear into the space
that was my first dark home—

cut away
and pulled out finally.

—Laura Bellows

Turquoise Motel

One of those nights
when he fights with the sheets
and I have to go somewhere away.

The room was dark
but not dark enough to cover
the cool blankets twisted
around him captured
like the moon
in continuous circles.

I watched as he wound
tight strips of light about himself
wanting more than
just to spin.

That morning, with static cartoons
he told me he was awakened
by a force—some pounding like buffalo

the air break and crumble
cracked by grating dischordance
thick in grayness

out back it charges in steel
pierce through stars
cold and slick
alone in steam
when leaves turn and shake
red against the track
blue against the sky
already lost with nowhere to rest
hearing someone say:

Go home
Go home
Just want
To go home

At a party
two years later
he asked me if I remembered
the train
the sound
each cog and wheel whizz and
whine clear
through the stillness only found
in a sleeping mouth

Or on the paw of a
house cat that sits by the door
who meows and squinches a
sandpaper tongue
to scoop up air and make sound
that sound I heard;
or was heard by.

I said I remembered only
the open sky that breathes away from
people who stare at a train
not wanting to change
the lines that connect
the tracks smoothed over.

But air didn't matter at all.
Even still, with years between
its only lights that strip us down
so lines can lay
still on our lives.

—Nix Funt

Doug Pippin

Prologue

The experience of college might be further enriched and enjoyed if one occasionally stands back to take a light, casual look at it.

Amateurlogue

Why do colleges exist? How is it that these great learning institutions have come to flourish on the face of the earth? (I don't know who else's face they could flourish on, though.) It's about time somebody answered these questions squarely, so I'll give it a shot.

For starters, imagine that there were no colleges. Where would we park our cars? What would we do with the land now used for these colleges? I suppose we could sell it back to the Indians, but if they were smart they'd invest in something else like satellites or computers. We could ship the land off to Africa, but imagine the cost of putting up fences around the holes after the land is gone. Heck, it would be cheaper to keep the colleges and sell the fences to Africa.

Anyway, like it or not, we have colleges. My guess is that they came about because students got tired of being in high school up to the sixteenth grade. Then (after hundreds of hot-under-the-collar PTA members met together by candlelight in an abandoned warehouse at midnight) came the Big Idea: send the older students off someplace, use the extra desks for scrap metal, and give the 12th graders a chance to play varsity football.

Speaking of football, I wonder which came first, college or college football. I'd bet my parking sticker it was college football. When football came around, we needed stadiums. And if you're going to build a stadium, why not order a few extra bricks and build a college. Besides, without a college around, who could find the stadium?

We have so many colleges around today because jobs are so hard to get. What better place to stash thousands of kids until enough working people retire, go insane, or win the lottery and become hermits? Of course, people must learn a skill in order to work, and so college offers courses such as "The Philosophy of Waking up in the Morning" and "The Sociology of Working Eight Hours a Day Instead of Seven and Three-Fourths."

Colleges also exist because we need names and mascots to put on shirts and banners and uniforms. Can you imagine a football game in the snow? Players in blank white uniforms running through heavy snow on the field. Spectators dressed in blank white shirts and pants, waving blank white banners in the stands. The crowd would be so bored they'd all fall asleep. When they awoke and everybody looked the same, they wouldn't know who they were. How would they get home? Who would win the game? When would the snow melt? Didn't think of these things before, huh? Well, that'll teach you—next time play basketball.

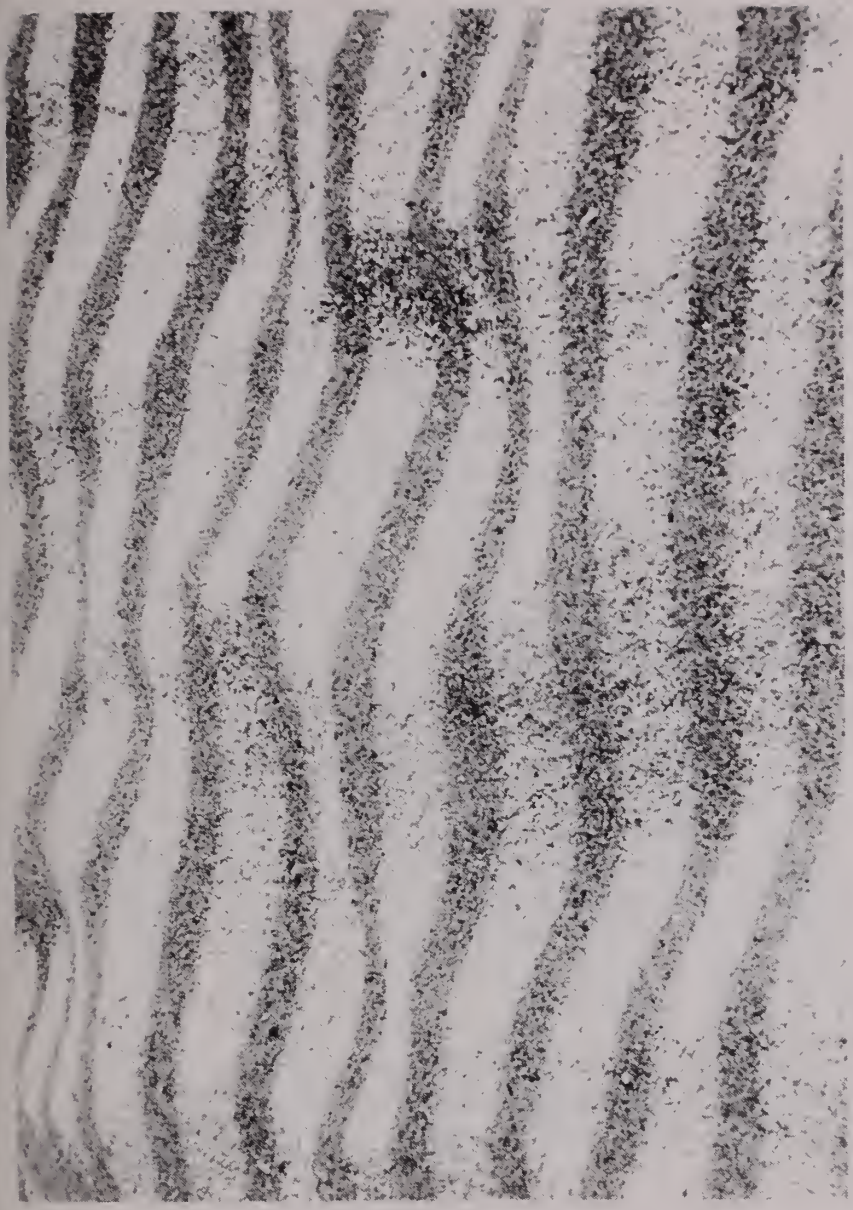
Now how is it that many colleges have come to be called universities? Well, it could be that too many people were confusing "college" with "collage" and were getting quite angry about paying an arm and a leg for an elementary school poster.

It may also interest you to know that the word "college" apparently is derived from the Greek phrase "kal itt ledg", which means "make a loan", while the word "university" comes from the Latin "unn vursii te", which means "big parking lots".

More importantly, colleges exist because the world can't afford to be run by four billion dummies. People must learn engineering, science, and business. Without this, who would design our cars, build the highways, and perform the administration so that people could go to college and learn engineering, science, and business to build more highways and cars so that more people can learn engineering, science and business?

Also, people must learn in order to improve the quality of life and to strive for progress. I mean, take away people and what is the world? An old imperfect blue ball circling an old hot orange ball. And who wants to circle an orange ball with nothing to do?

—Matthew Moore



Waves . . . of Sand *Sheri Swackhamer*

Lost

You call me from Atlanta in the middle of the night
years and years too late
worried that all your friends and you
will die from AIDS.
I say yes, I worry about you too.
As we count our losses I hear the fear that makes you
reevaluate the past and phone your old disasters for details
to flesh out the hollows of your life.
In the middle of the night you want my memories
and you want to apologize because
you really didn't care at the time.

The darkness is an empty space for cigarette trails
from mouth to ashtray and back.
Your mother still asks about me
regrets I lost the child of her only son.
She will never have another.
When I see her she blames me with her sorrow and says
'It would have been so nice
It would have been 5,8,10 this year'
I don't wonder much anymore about
each possible combination of us
merged to form the imagined child.
I have measured the hurt
in the tilt of small faces and
put it away.
But late at night you want to poke around my attic
afraid because pain and death may touch you now.
You want to hear a bed time story.

I was very young and in love with a careless man
Alone in my parents house dreaming innocent
Felt the first flutter of life and in
that same slow moment felt a wrench
as it tore then
slipped away from me
I reached down
as though I could put it back into
the safety of my body
the blood was ours and I thought
This is a punishment
Unaware that nothing of us
was meant to go on.

—Diane Vance

Dana *Beth Hamby*

Tony Song

Salvation is Rescinded on the Chattahoochee

Those sheer curtains drift through rough, thick air.
The waters have risen too high—
deep, muddy as the final jar of water
in a child's watercolor class.
It laps at the window sills, bitter little tongues flicker
in the dull light. It will lick the lineoleum,
the legs of chairs, my legs if I stay.

Those curtains in the hall flutter, a raw stain on the hems.
The waters have risen too high—
a dark green pushed in on the whiteness of my nice white life.
Sugar bowl, porcelain stove, icebox,
those two white china cats with pinpoint red sharp whiskers—
all bobbing like white ducks
in a shooting gallery pond.

Back and forth.
Something pulls those waters—silt and mud,
thick black whips of snakes.
My house is their house.
Rude and arrogant,
they know my gun and broom are gone.
I can't make them leave.

The sky's still heavy, bulging wth rain,
a grey, old sheet tied at the corners.
Some child's playing in that sheet. Hopping up and down.
It'll break.
Only my prayers prop it up.
Water will make no allowance for my weight.
I'll sink below those thick green waters.

The curtains higher still are starched and dance with wildflowers.
Flowers I won't see again.
Outside is green, green, green water and freak trees.
Short trunks with enormous heads.
My eyes are looking into funny mirrors. I back away.
The trees stay the same. Outside
there must be something besides water, snakes and carnival trees.

The attic door must open.
Snakes are close by as the waters rise.
Is there a word for the sound my heart made
when I saw that old stored canoe.
Who stores canoes when the wharf's outside?
Who carried it up all those wooden stairs?
Old man, fit for nothing, I thank you.

There's nothing higher than the attic
except the roof, except heaven.
No curtains on these windows.
They won't open out nor in.
Cement, white and old as my brittle bones,
dried stiff, edge this window.
The dark green makes an awful quiet coming in.

—Nancy O'Donnell

Haze

The meadow is a white sea of pollen
Airborne and smothering
The stream rift is a woman's back
Shoulders hunched up and clouded
With bees,
And the sun seems to stop
Each day
With a dry tapping from the forest.
We ran out there somethimes, she and I
Running in a field under an airplane's fluid whistle,
We felt that we could fly almost,
Soar through the blue and yellow.
The edges of things were softened
And sometimes lost in the golden blur
Of pollen
And we'd look and look but never find
The woodpecker in the dead black branches
Across that pool of white fire.

She'd tell of people's bodies in the ground,
How if we stomped they'd wake up and stare at us
Through the dirt with tired eyes
Then turn back over and drift to sleep again.
We made up names and faces,
Favorite foods and favorite
Times and dates,
And poked dead sticks in the ground to locate
Their quiet heads and feet.

Once I went out alone and lay down
In the ravine where ragged holes
In the dry dirt walls ejaculated bees
And fell asleep to the march of freeway traffic through the haze
And I awoke to see her standing on the edge
Looking down at me silently
In the afternoon hum
And then she ran off into the yellow without a sound

Or explanation.
Nobody I told this to could understand
What it was that made it seem so strange
To me.
Now the tall grass is cut and covered up
With road and sod
And I can see new dogwoods where the black trees stood
There's no more pollen, but still
As the days pass
I can see the edges of things soften
And slowly disappear.

—Michael T. Walker

The Contemplative Process of Ice Cream Consumption

David Kushner

Philosophical Metro *David Kushner*

Search Called Off In Bay Boating Accident

all I
can remember
is the
steam
rising
from the surface ice.

How long were you together?
He was my father.
Yes. But with the boat?

long time
it got dark
dark and
calm
all the
bone, the bay, boat, black.

Who tried to recover the bird?
We both. We were together.
No. Who had control of the rudder?
Me.

I had
the rudder
the snow
aims
at us,
the white goose gets caught in

white ice
just floating
further
down
and spins
clamping the crippled goose

in quiet,
it went lame
like dead
snow,
it capsized,
all I can remember

is the
snowflakes sticking
to his
red
face and
getting in my eyes.

Did you see the storm coming?
Yes.
Did the deceased see it?
No.
Why not?
He wanted the goose.

You see, I shot it.
I shot it.
Why did you go out?
Did you know
it was the last day
of the season?

—Joel David Aronfy

Remembrance of a Village

Mud bricks
dried and built
to create distorted symmetry
and form a crude stronghold
for one Brazilian family.

Our concrete house
lay on a cement block
slightly overlooking the village,
the ditch, of Injeneu do maio.

Rains, Rains, and awesome downpours
will come. And wash away
Luciano's house. And his father
will rebuild.

Sugar cane stalks
surround the rears
of each mud mansion
encircling small squares
which support each family's
chickens.

All the children who
live in our ditch will await
dusk and turn the corner
onto the lone cement street,
walk for a few minutes
and go into the park.

I taught them hide and seek
and tag, and freeze tag.
When we finished playing
we would venture deep
into the trees,
to the dried up pond.

There, we would collect frogs.
Big frogs. One that I saw,
but did not attempt to touch
was at least eight inches wide.

When, we grew tired
we would walk down
the hard road,
to the ditch
as a cloud of bats
filled the night air.

—David Klima

Margaret Ramos

Indian Summer

The bleak desert panorama stretched flat toward the horizon, occasional dusty mountains blurring into the general haze of highway and sand. The scene melted colorlessly past the windows of the moving car.

Two children lay head to head-tipped, but held in by seatbelts. The boy's overlong dark bangs obscured his eyes and his legs curled awkwardly beneath him. His mouth was a thin, almost invisible line. The girl, on the other hand, had flung herself across the back, one arm on her brother's knee, one on the cushion. Her legs shot straight out, disappearing under the front seat.

The air was stale in the car and the heat pressed against the glass of the closed windows. It was hot.

"Lord it's hot," the mother complained, shifting in her seat. "Turn on the air conditioning, Dave. All I'm getting from these windows is more heat. Damn, I hate the west."

"I told you, it's a waste of energy, Liz. We're doing 65 here and those windows should be as good as any fan—"

"Do you want me to pass out? Is that what you want?"

He closed his window and turned on the air. The children stirred.

"Mommy?" The little girl sat up. "Mommy, can I take off this seatbelt yet? It's hurting me."

"No, Rosey. I told you, it isn't safe, Sit still, love. Ben? How are you, sweetheart?"

The boy straightened himself in his seat and looked attentively at his mother.

"Fine," he said. "Mom? Have I been asleep long? Did I miss anything?"

"Only desert, dear—it's all the same." She motioned vaguely at the window. "It's very dreary."

"I'm cold," Ben said suddenly. "Can we open a window? It's cold in here."

Liz immedaitely leaned forward and flicked off the air conditioner.

"Rosey," she called over her shoulder, "open up your window, dear."

"Why can't Ben open his?" The girl asked plaintively.

"Too much wind for him, honey, open yours."

Rosey made a put upon, huffy sound, but rolled down her window.

* * *

The cottage was set on a flat, sandy lot, fringed with withered trees. They pulled up to it in late afternoon and made their way warily out of the car.

"Well," Liz said, forcing a smile, "at least it's private. We won't be bothered by any of the tourists around here."

"Not to worry," Dave agreed, pulling bags from the trunk, "the place is desolate." He laughed hollowly. "We'll have plenty of quiet over this weekend, and then we'll be all rested for Monday."

Liz shot him a dissaproving glance, and shook her head sharply.

"Is there TV?" Rosey asked, "Do they at least have TV here?"

"Sure they do," Dave said. He fumbled with the keys at the front door. "Course they have TV."

They trooped into the front room—the living room.

"Look!" Ben pointed, "A fire place! Can we make a fire? I love fires!"

Rosey made a face at him, "It's *summer*, stupid. You don't make fires in summer."

"Don't call your brother stupid, Rosey," Liz scolded. "He's not stupid."

"It may get cold here at night, anyway," Dave added. "We'll see."

The night was a warm one. They built a fire and watched it sputter and die.

The next day, Friday, was clear and harshly bright. Benjamin woke up first, and sat by the large window in the combination living room/dining room, looking out at the sunburned morning. Rosey trudged in, pajamaed feet dragging.

"You take all the covers," she said. "I don't like sleeping with you."

Ben turned momentarily from the window.

"We have to," he said. "There's only two bedrooms."

She climbed onto one of the dining room chairs and rummaged through a bowl of fruit, fingering and discarding each piece.

"I don't care," she pouted. "I hate it here."

He looked at her, nervously moving his hands across the window sill.

"Sorry," he mumbled.

"How long do we have to stay here, anyway?" she demanded, hunching down in the chair and kicking her feet against the rungs. "I wanted to go to *summer* camp."

"No you didn't," he contradicted her, "You went last year and you hated it. You told me you did."

She stared sullenly at the tabletop for a few seconds, then met his eye.

"I lied," she sneered, showing several gaps where teeth used to be. Benjamin accepted this without comment.

Hushed voices drifted out from the hall and Rosey stilled her legs. Ben froze also, listening.

"It's only a 45 minute drive," their father was saying. "This was the closest place I could get, for crying out loud. You refused to stay in that hotel, not me."

"It was *not* a hotel," Liz shot back. "It was a pathetic little—waiting place. All of those families just—" she stopped, and the children at the table remained frozen, silent. "I want to try and keep this family *normal*, for God's sake, and

you don't help me one bit! Why don't you just bring up Monday every second? Don't you *ever* think before you open up your mouth?"

Their father stretched the silence, then answered in a lower, concilatory tone.

"We can visit every day, anyway. Forget it, ok? Don't get all upset all the time." The bed creaked under him. "If there's one thing I can't stand it's your constant fits. Now can I please get some sleep before I go out and have to perform for the two of them? That's all I ask, just another few minutes. Sometimes there is absolutely no talking to you, you know that?"

Rosey slid off her seat and joined Ben at the window, peering out.

"There's barely any grass here," she said, "What happened to all the grass?"

"It dried up and died," Ben answered, "Things don't live too well here."

Rosey laughed, "Mommy and Daddy think they do."

She trotted into the little hall that was the kitchen. There was a counter, its base full of drawers, and several cabinets on the wall above it. Rosey pulled out a bottom drawer, stepped on its edge, and scrambled up onto the counter. From this all powerful perch she opened and surveyed each of the cabinets.

"There's nothing in here," she said accusingly. Ben came to stand behind her, peering up at the open shelves.

"Yes there is. Mom brought a lot of stuff. There's cereal and beans and—"

"There's nothing *good*," Rosey said with finality. She slid onto the floor and flounced past Ben, disappearing into the hall.

"Mommy, there's nothing to *eat*," he heard her shrill at their parents' door.

"There's lots in the cabinet, Rosey, now let Mommy sleep."

"But none of it *tastes* good. Why didn't you bring anything *good*?"

"You know Ben has to follow his diet, baby, now be good and give me another half hour."

Rosey emerged from the hall and sneered at Ben, who stared back benignly. She was younger by a little more than two years and had infinitely more snarl and energy than he.

She returned to the kitchen, scaled the counter and dragged out a box of pure Bran cereal, a paper bowl and plastic spoon. She set them, and herself, down at the dining room table and looked up fiercely at her brother.

"Get me the milk," she ordered, making a face at the cereal as it clattered into her bowl. He fetched the milk and sat down across from her at the table.

"When are you going?" she asked, mouth full.

"Monday."

"You scared?"

"Only a little."

"Liar. I'd be scared if I was getting a million shots. I'd scream my brains out. Last time I had a checkup I bit the doctor."

"I remember that," he said, " but you were littler then."

"I was six and it was only last year." she said indignantly, "I'd do it again,

too, only they wouldn't dare try to stick me anymore. You ever bite any of those doctors?"

"No."

"Well I would if I were you. Why don't you?" It was a demand. He thought a moment before answering her.

"I'm too tired," he said, "Last time, in the hospital in Boston I asked one of the doctors to please stop, but he didn't listen. He just said 'you want to live, don't you?' and I said no, not really, but he told me to stop being childish. It was stupid. I mean I am a child, aren't I? But he ignored me, he just went right on."

"Does it hurt? All those things they do?"

"Sometimes. Yes. A lot. But mostly it's just very stupid."

"This *place* is stupid," she complained. "Especially the food. I want pancakes—and ice cream." She pushed the bowl away contemptously. He looked at the cereal, then at her, then back at the window.

"That Boston doctor told me the wrong foods are like a trigger in my stomach. He said that's how I should think of it, like I'm a loaded gun. He always talks to me like I'm an idiot."

"Well I would bite him," she said, "I really would."

With that she left him to turn on the morning cartoons, complaining bitterly about the unfamiliar channels. Ben sat silently for a while, then got up and went to the door.

"I'm going outside," he told her. Rosey didn't answer.

Sand and dust were everywhere—in the bleak, stunted little garden and invading the sidewalk along its cracks. A car whizzed by on the highway, sending up a small wave of dirt, and from a twisted, clumsily looking tree an ugly bird squalked and flew off, wings awkwardly slamming the air.

Ben walked to the end of the sidewalk, which disintegrated into rubble, and looked down the highway. In the distance he could make out several shabby looking buildings—a gas station stop town. Glancing down at the ground, he drew a line in the dust with his shoe, fascinated at the trail he could leave. A few inches away, a small white moth scittered across the earth, unable to fly. Ben squatted, examining it. The moth stumbled into a rock, struggling and batting its wings frantically, blindly. He squinted at it, staring down into the little pit it was making in the sand. One of the moth's wings was ripped, missing a piece. Ben watched it strain for several moments, then stood up, still following its writhings. Unceremoniously he raised his foot and brought it down hard, holding it there for a minute before lifting it and moving back a step.

"You're welcome," he said.

He began to walk along the shoulder of the highway, toward the red gas station sign twirling in the distance, a banner of welcome to the town. It didn't say "Welcome to Sunnyville, population 54" or anything like that. It said "Last Fill-

ing Station for 100 Miles—Is Your Tank Full?" There was another, smaller sign which announced, "Last Restroom in 100 Miles" and then in handwritten black magic marker below it was added, "It's Now or Never". Ben looked toward these as he walked, kicking at the sand with fresh white sneakers.

He didn't have any clothes that looked played in. In fact, everything he wore seemed an attempt to add years to him—the starched, navy blue slacks concealing his bruised and fragile legs, and the button down white oxford shielding cavernous chest and bony arms. He walked not like a little boy, loosely, with bounce, as if there was always somewhere to go, but like an old man, delicately, on the balls of his feet, and with no special purpose.

As he walked, he drifted off the shoulder onto the asphalt of the highway. He began to hum—an unrecognizable and faltering mixture of several nursery rhymes. He smiled to himself.

The explosion of a horn sent him skipping forward in a momentary frenzy, and a car swerved, screeching, to avoid him. The driver leaned his head out the window, shouting furious and frightening obscenities over his shoulder. Ben moved back onto the shoulder, putting his hands in his pockets and slumping a little.

"Ben!" Rosey's shrill command sounded several paces behind him. Reluctantly, he turned to find her hurrying forward, pajamas peeking out of a one-piece jumpsuit she had shrugged on. Her shoes were untied, and the laces flapped with gray sand as she tripped toward him. "Where're you going?" she breathed as she reached him.

"I thought you were watching TV."

"Tom and Jerry finished. There's only *news* on now." She spat the word onto the dust. "So where're you going?"

"For a walk," he said obliquely, "It might be a long one. Go home, you'll get too tired."

"No, I won't. I want to come. I'm coming," she announced. She stared him down. He turned and resumed walking, with Rosey bobbing at his side.

"What's that?" She pointed to the town.

"I don't know. A place."

"People *live* there?"

"Probably."

"Yuck. They must be stupid."

"Rosey . . . "

"I mean it! They can't live here. Only Indians are supposed to live here."

"Well maybe they *are* Indians."

"Uh uh—all of them got shot millions of years ago. They're dead."

"Not all. It couldn't be all. *Some* of them didn't die."

"You're stupid. They're all shot. I saw it on TV."

They reached the gas station and went inside. A tattered vending machine stood

against the wall, littered with paint chips from the peeling ceiling. It was full of melting candy bars. Rosey squeeled.

"Ben! Do you have any money? Gimme a candy!" Ben went up and peererd over the counter at the middle aged attendant dozing in a leather recliner that seemed polished with vaseline.

"Does this machine work?" he asked, pointing to it. The attendant stirred and half opened his eyes.

"Huh?"

"The candy machine. Does it work?"

"Yeah, I think so. Course it does. Everything in this station is in perfect working order. Course it *works*." He grew annoyed as he considered the question, and finally settled back to sleep.

Rosey was at the machine, trying to shove her hand up through the tube which delivered the candy. Ben dug into his pocket and produced several coins. He dropped them into the machine and allowed Rosey to point to her choice, press it's button and grab at it when it came slipping gooily down the tunnel. After a moments hesitation he deposited another set of coins, selected a candy with grave deliberation, caught it, and shoved it deep into his pocket.

"Thank you," he said to the counter, from behind which the man grunted in his sleep. Rosey was already at the door, developing a chocolate beard.

The sun seemed brighter as they emerged from the station office, and Ben squinted across the street. There was a small grocery and souvenir shop, front window obscured with encrusted dirt. A thin old woman sat on a tall stool out front, kneading a piece of clay between gnarled fingers. A ragged dog lay at her feet, panting in the heat. Ben crossed the street and Rosey followed, dropping her candy wrapper on the yellow highway line.

"Hello," Ben said. The woman looked up, past him, then back at her fingers. He stooped beside the dog, reaching to pet it.

"He bites," she said, without glancing up. Her voice was as cracked as her face, and hard, and dry. She had yellow flecks in the brown desert of her eyes.

Rosey moved up close to the woman, fascinated, and watched her hands work.

"What are you making?" she asked. The woman didn't answer. Rosey, apperently under the impression that she hadn't been heard, shouted,"*What are you making*?"

The woman looked up and grinned, thin lips split over a row of jagged teeth, as yellow as her eyes. Rosey retreated a step.

Ben moved beside his sister, solemn and staring.

"Are you an Indian?" he asked.

The woman nodded, no longer grinning.

"No you're not," Rosey challenged, "You are not! There's no such thing as Indians anymore. They're from the olden days. How old are you anyway?"

"Old," the woman echoed, rolling the clay into a ball.

Rosey absorbed this, then looked at Ben.

"Are you going to die soon?" she asked the woman.

The hands pinched the clay into a rectangular box, long and flat. The fingers hollowed it out.

"Soon."

"When?" It was Ben who asked, taking a step forward as he said it. The hands smoothed the sides of the clay rectangle, sharpening the corners and digging a trenchlike center. The woman smiled, slowly shaking her head.

"Where do you live?" Rosey interupted. "If you're an old Indian, do you live in a teepee? Do you?" Ben frowned at her.

"Indians don't live in teepees anymore, Rosey. It doesn't matter anyway. What's the difference where she lives?"

"We're from New Hampshire," Rosey told the woman, ignoring Ben. "We live in a townhouse with two swings in back, and my room has pink wallpaper. I saw a teepee once in the museum." A thought suddenly occurred to her and she whirled on Ben. "See? She can't have a teepee. They don't put any real life stuff in the museum."

Ben focused on the woman's hands, honing her clay creation.

"Are you sick?" he asked, "Are you sick or are you just old?"

"My baby's east," The woman said suddenly, "Baby's 105. Hot blooded baby—gone east for snow. Baby has the fever."

"We're from the east," Rosey piped up, "I know all about the snow. But you're too old to have a baby. See, Ben? I told you she was a liar."

"She's closer to the sun in the mornings—" the woman said, hands trembling, "I'm closer to the sun in the evenings."

"The sun is always more beautiful in the evenings," Ben said, "It's always so much warmer at sunset."

"Are you hot blooded?" The woman asked him.

"No," Ben shook his head, "I'm always cold."

The woman began to cough.

The shop door opened, accompanied by a jingling of chimes. A grotesquely fat older man, in sales tagged tribal dress, leaned on the door frame.

"And what can I do for you?" he said in a strong midwestern accent. "Has desert Lilly here been bothering you?"

He addressed himself to the old woman in a syrupy tone. "What were you going on about Lilly? Were you telling these kiddies about your poor buried babe? Quiet down now, you're alright"

The woman stopped coughing and grinned. The man shook his head at the children and tapped his forehead, rolling his eyes as he did.

"You two looking for some genuine Indian souvenirs? Heard you mention Indians a while ago."

He reached around and retrieved a feathered headdress from the dust obscured window display. "These are genuine feathers." he said.

Rosey's eyes widened and she reached for it, stroking the brightly colored head piece.

"I didn't think there was such a *thing* as real Indians." she said.

"Oh, sure, sure, 100% genuine—straight off a chief. You think your Daddy might like one of these for his collection?" He leaned forward and his cheeks sagged toward Rosey.

"He doesn't have a collection," Ben said, tugging Rosey back. "Thank you anyway, though."

"Wow. Real Indians," she gaped, mouth open. The man shrugged, and withdrew the headress, letting the door swing shut as he retreated inside.

Ben turned to the woman. The clay sculpture lay finished on her lap and she stared down at it, unmoving. He reached over and touched her hands, feeling the weak throb of her viens. She looked at him then placed the clay box in his hand.

"Thank you," he said. "See you soon."

"Bye," Rosey added, as they returned to the highway, walking toward the cottage.

"Do you think Daddy will get me one of those feather things, Ben?" Rosey asked him. "I want to be a real live Indian and shoot all the cowboys who try to bother me."

"There are no more real live Indians," Ben said, holding the clay delicately in the palm of his hand, "I was wrong."

When they reached the door of the cottage Ben stopped. A herd of clouds was making its way across the horizon, and the sky that cushioned their drifting passage was a warm, clear blue. He looked at his sister.

"Rosey?" he said, "When you bit the doctor, did he bleed?"

—Adina Rishe

David Medwith

Off the Road and into a Ditch

Leaning back on the hood of the car,
I am something separate beside you
As I lie against the windshield,
So I test you, reach over with my toes
And brush your calf, and watch your face,
Blind to everything.
Whatever you see up there in the dark,

It's something that moves like smoke across a hill.
Wings, or hands, touch your face,
Or wait for you there.
I grow cold as the night deepens, and
You get up to look for a blanket in the trunk,
The ground, so quiet when you step,
That for a moment

I see you in completeness—
The way you move, quickly, through the air,
Through the silence, that finds an ending in you.
So to recognize you, I pull
The blanket up close under my chin
Though the car beneath me is colder,
Though I can't see your eyes.

But they must be darkening
Because there's a light on near the farm
Across the road, behind a swell of stacked rock
Held in a circle by the hidden hands
Of that dark. The dark that I listen to
Sounding like cicadas, or like the steady water
With its final whispers.

Splinters of light move in the sky.
A truck door slams shut, the sound
Scattered into branches,
Into the watery stars that swerve toward us
Like a round boat. The one
That will take you away.
Why am I shaken while you are so still?

—Turi Baston

Chan Chao

Das rennen *Kim S. Riegel*

Like David's Marat, My Love

Words I will not say again:
shattered iris, and the splinters
slice as clean as glass—
(Only hurting when oxygen rakes the gash)

But astonished flesh, first ivory pale,
briefly checks its grief then rushes
melted rubies, thick and real
and appalling in their urgency . . .
Up-pumping obscenely
No
We should be
as Romans
in out hot baths unfeeling

We should bleed as steam—
languid in our ebbing,
dissipating silently, with the flesh retiring
gracefully
enigmatically smiling

—Rollins Briggs

Tony Song

Jacob's Ladder

It's too late in the afternoon to have
reason to delay much longer so we
drive over to the Dell's for eggs even
though this Indian summer's heat clenches
itself so hard over the plywood coops
that thirteen thousand chickens died. The fields
lie tight in fallow and we can see from
here that the hills spread like a charcoal smudge
in the distance. In a shed, in the back
the old farmer shows us his machine that

does nothing but make a Jacob's ladder,
the wrenched white line of electricity
pulls itself up between two poles as if
fluid. *Don't touch* he says and the smell
of burning and tobacco hung in ceiling
rafters is thick, but the thin light like
lightning trained, rises and vanishes,
rises and vanishes, an ecstacy
of pure, simple purpose. We get a dipper
of water at the pump and how far you

have to bend to meet the stream reminds me
of my great uncle Lawrence, so tall and
strong he died when trying to hold up sheet
metal that slid on his ship in World War II.
He got a medal for dying in the
line of duty. I know about him just
by pictures and stories. If we were
children, we would look for farm animals
the way we saw them in books, but now we
can smell how near the stench of chickens left

to rot is to any flesh beaten down
by sun. I don't want to stay, but the old
man has us see the relics he has that
we've no cause to know. Here is a clockwork,

no hands or numbers to trace the hours and
minutes—we accept by faith that this is
how we pace our days, gears folding into
each other, the low hum of mechanism.
And there we see how steam churns itself through
a wheel that flips over and over. This

old man, his hands shake so badly that to
fill his pipe I reach out to catch the bowl
and hold it steady. I can't say what this
means to me—just that I can see how
slats between the boards of the shed sliver
light into tracery in the dirt. What
I want to say is—once a friend lost someone
to some senseless twisting of metal against
metal and she cried with her face to
a woman and I knew I could never

offer that to her. This I remember:
watching you stoop so your face comes close to
the farmer's. I want to ask you what it
was like, if he smelled of tobacco, urine,
or of the air that wraps itself around us
in its assertion of death. But you smile
and talk, point to this and that bit of
machinery, and I envy you. I
want out. Already the shadows sprawl
across the yard, and the hens begin to

slow their calls to the rhythms of dusk.
The farmer lights a hurricane lantern,
and we bring our box of eggs to the car.
The engine coughs itself into starting,
and we pull out into the clemency
of darkness. I feel your arm stretched along
the back of the seat; in the side mirror
I can see the light from the old man's lamp
moving against the backdrop of the shed
like a star broken loose.

—Laura Dickinson

UMCP—January, 1987

How the fuck did I get here?
They have a goddamn turtle in front of the graduate library
And a church that plays
"Oh, Christmas Tree", for chrissakes.
And what's this supposed to be?
A miniature Stonehenge or something?
And who the hell ordered all this snow?

You know, I could be in Austin right now.

—Allen Hogg

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